

The Moral Libertarian Horizon Series

Volume 4

A Liberal Traditionalism Manifesto

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The Origins of the Current Crisis of Meaning in Liberalism

It is often said that our world today gives human beings an unhealthy existence, where they exist merely as slaves to their economic needs, and where individuals exist in an atomized form, alienated from other people and thus prevented from having their full range of social needs met. It is also often said that this existence has taken a toll on the psychological health of many, contributing to the high rates of mental illness in modern society. I guess all this has to be true, at least to an extent. Various political factions, including, unfortunately, extremists, have offered supposed ways out of this situation. However, they are all both impractical and unconvincing. Some are even literally dangerous to humanity.

To understand our current plight, I guess we should take a look at how we got here. As Europe was emerging out of a feudalistic order

and into the earliest stages of industrialized economy back in the 18th and 19th century, the political divisions that we often take for granted today began to emerge. The first stage saw the division of politics into a 'Left' and a 'Right' during the French Revolution, with the Left including those who wanted a more egalitarian order, and the Right including those who want to maintain as much of the old order as possible, and as such, were generally against egalitarianism. (Note that the 'historical Left' and 'historical Right' here don't necessarily correspond to today's Left and Right; many on today's Right would be on the 'historical Left'.) This was the birth of the paradigm that pit equality and tradition against each other, as a binary opposition. By circumstance of history, the 'historical Left', the faction that believed in equality and ultimately gave rise to liberals and socialists alike, was alienated from an appreciation of tradition at birth. This was further encouraged by the fact that their opponents on the 'historical Right' have too often used tradition to justify the denial of

egalitarian reforms, on questions from democracy to ending slavery to women's participation in politics.

The paradigm that frames equality and tradition as binary opposites continue to exert enormous influence even on today's politics, as seen in recent debates like the one on gay marriage, where those who opposed gay marriage behaved as if traditions are inherently vulnerable to damage by reforms towards egalitarianism, and those who supported gay marriage didn't often care to emphasize their appreciation of tradition, which made the opponents' stance look credible for a while at least. As I often said to my fellow supporters of reform, yes, this is about equality, but if we didn't care deeply about the institution of marriage at all we wouldn't be here either, so perhaps we should balance the two in our messaging. Something that was often received with scepticism by my comrades, unfortunately. It took until former conservative British Prime

Minister David Cameron's famous speech in 2012, two decades after the whole debate started, that there was widespread awareness about a so-called 'conservative case for gay marriage'.

The fact is, as morally sound as liberal values and principles are (and liberalism, as broadly understood, is indeed the most morally sound ideology, as I have illustrated in all of my Moral Libertarian writings so far), liberals have all too often been agnostic to the wider questions of culture, meaning, and heritage. Back in the 19th century, this was perhaps fine, as the traditional cultural context in which liberalism was born was still largely intact. But two centuries later, we live in a world few people probably envisioned back then: a world where nothing seems to have any permanent meaning, and nothing seems to be inherently worth cherishing, because it would be replaced by something else soon enough. It's a world where people throw away their possessions before

they are broken, simply so that they can get the latest model instead. It's a world where even marriage, the most bedrock of institutions since time immemorial, has ceased to be permanent for at least two generations, with about 40% of marriages ending in divorce. That's 4 in 10! We've gotten so used to 'facts of life' like these that many don't even notice how dystopian they really are.

Critics on both the contemporary left and the contemporary right charge liberalism with being about technocratic management of the economy and society, and they paint liberalism as all about transactional politics. But this is not inherently true of liberalism. Back when traditional culture was still intact, liberal values like free speech, freedom of conscience and freedom of religion alike were valuable because they were the means for peacefully debating over things which people cherished. In other words, free speech was valuable because the speech was used to debate things which people

cherished, and would fight nail and tooth for. Similarly, our democratic processes, the very processes which both the hard left and the hard right deride as technocratic today, were valuable because they ensured a fair outcome in the determination of laws and policies that people cherished. Using a more Moral Libertarian perspective, people valued having the Equal share of Moral Agency because they wanted to use that Agency to protect or promote that which they cherished. As you see, the key word here is 'cherish'. In a world where there is nothing much left to cherish anymore, politics is reduced to either a game of power struggle (which is the way both the hard left and the hard right see it) or a reality TV style popularity contest (which is perhaps why the current US President is a reality TV star). There simply is no place for classical liberal values in either of these types of 'politics'.

Therefore, in their neglect about preserving a cultural environment where people have things

to cherish, liberals have contributed to their own decline over the decades and centuries. While liberals have never actively encouraged the destruction of traditional cultural institutions, their indifference has allowed other forces to erode these institutions over time. Of the forces that destroyed traditional culture, I think there are two that are most important. The first is the brutality of capitalist market forces. While I'm a firm believer in the market economic system, there needs to be a safety net so that there wouldn't be excessive economic stress on traditional institutions like marriage and the family. What many liberals have failed to understand is that, it is not enough for the safety net to be just big enough to keep individual people from starving. Rather, it needs to be strong enough to prevent marriage, family, and other traditional institutions from being eroded by economic forces. Having a big enough safety net to keep all families healthy and strong is not 'socialism'; it is something that we need to do to prevent civilization from disintegrating over time.

The other important force that caused the destruction of traditional culture is socio-political radicalism from sections of the Western far-left. It all started among disillusioned Western communists during the period around WWII, who were at pains to find a reason for the West failing to embrace a communist revolution. Many of them settled on a cultural explanation: that the traditional cultural institutions of the West were responsible for preventing the workers from gaining sufficient class consciousness to become revolutionary.

This is all complete nonsense, because as we all know, the reason why Marx's prediction of revolution didn't come true was simply because he had used the wrong mathematical models to arrive at his conclusions. (Marx subscribed to the 'labour theory of value', which led him to predict that profits would inevitably fall over time, leading to capitalism collapsing, and the economic oppression of the working class during this process would goad them into revolution. However, the labour theory of value

simply isn't valid because it fails to take into account the role of demand in prices and hence profit.) Failing to acknowledge the real reasons for capitalism defying Marx's prediction, and firmly believing their own nonsense about the culture holding workers down, Western neo-Marxists set out to dismantle traditional cultural values and institutions, one by one.

Furthermore, some of them sought to broaden the Marxist idea of class conflict, to apply it to non-economically defined groups in society, like men vs women for example. These ideas took on new life with the '1968 generation' of student radicals, some of whom eventually became influential thinkers. The end result of all this is the ruin of many traditional cultural values and institutions across the Western world. Meanwhile, liberals, generally locked in an electoral battle with conservatives, failed to meaningfully pay attention to all this while it was happening.

With no traditional institutions left to cherish, and no values left to defend, politics has become meaningless for many people, who have since disengaged from the process. On the other hand, the field of political activism is now mostly occupied by people who feel aggrieved for one reason or another, who see politics as primarily a power struggle to get back what they feel is rightfully theirs. These people have no use for classical liberal values like free speech, freedom of conscience, representative democracy and due process, because these values don't serve their ends. Instead, ideologies like identitarian politics (of both the left and right varieties), vulgar neo-Marxism (of both the economic and cultural kind), toxic forms of nationalism, and even dangerous racial supremacist ideologies, have come to dominate the political landscape of those who are still passionately involved. Diverse as they may be, they all reflect an animalistic dog-eat-dog mentality, and ultimately serve to demonstrate the dark side of human nature that is often

clearly exposed once the values of civilization are peeled away.

Therefore, the path to revitalizing liberalism, is through revitalizing civilization itself. It is through the restoration of meaningful cultural institutions and values that people can cherish. It is through rebuilding a strong social fabric that supports the meaningful debate and application of civilizational values. Anything less will probably see liberalism become an increasingly impotent force, cast aside because of its irrelevance in a dog-eat-dog world.

Enlightenment Traditionalism: The Path Not Taken

NOTE: In this book, I will use 'Enlightenment traditionalism' to refer to the hypothetical historical 'path not taken', and I will use 'liberal traditionalism' to refer to the path we could possibly forge in the future.

To expand our horizons, so that we can re-imagine how civilization ought to look like, I think it is useful to go back in time, to look for historical paths that could have been taken, but were ultimately not. Where should we look? As I am a Moral Libertarian, I clearly believe in the idea of equality between people, so my values clearly lie with the 'historical Left' of the French Revolution. Therefore, it would be useful to look at critical points in the development of the 'historical Left' since the time of the French Revolution.

The first major tradition that came out of the 'historical Left' of the time of the French Revolution was liberalism, which has since diverged into different traditions like libertarianism (now regarded as on the right) and social liberalism (now regarded as centre-left). Furthermore, even the conservatism that exists in the modern West, particularly in countries like America with its liberal Constitution and institutions, is partially informed by this historical liberal tradition. The liberal tradition is primarily concerned with individual liberty, with naturally strong concerns for free speech, freedom of conscience and religion, and civil and political rights for all. Economically, it is just natural that a commitment to free market economics of some form is core to just about every tradition of liberalism, with libertarians perhaps taking this to the extreme. The liberal tradition has, in my opinion, been the best gift to humankind in its entire history. It has liberated humanity from the shackles of absolute dominance by hereditary aristocracies, and in doing so, not

only unleashed great potential for creativity, innovation and progress, but also put an end to much of the immorality that was characteristic of feudal society, through new systems of checks and balances.

However, given that the historical mission of early liberalism was to liberate humanity from the shackles of feudalism, it is natural that it is relatively weak on topics like the relational bonds that define human societies, the shared values and institutions that give us all something to believe in, and so on. This means it has none of the 'grandeur' of feudal culture with its strong, if inegalitarian, institutions, and its culture of honour, even if inconsistently applied. Liberalism may be liberating and morally sound, but it doesn't lend any greatness to life, and this, I believe, explains much of the discontent towards liberalism throughout the past three centuries. Furthermore, liberalism's lack of emphasis on the relationships between individuals has opened it up to accusations of

fostering the atomization of individuals, with all the unhealthy effects that follow.

This discontent with liberalism was how the 'historical Left' of 19th century Europe started to split, and a second tradition, socialism, gradually emerged. Of the slogan 'liberty, equality, fraternity', socialists were most concerned about fraternity, at times to the detriment of liberty. In many cases, socialists didn't even see people as individuals, they only see them in the collective form, even when they are not biologically related (more on this in the next chapter). In many ways, the rise of socialism was a reaction to the weaknesses in early liberalism. Throughout the 19th and 20th century, socialism gradually developed into a self-contained tradition completely separate from liberalism, and eventually took over the banner of 'the left' completely from liberals. This is why 'the left' tends to refer to socialists rather than liberals nowadays, and why some liberals (e.g. libertarians) whose agenda is

completely at odds with socialism are now defined as right-wing.

Socialism shares liberalism's roots in the 'historical Left' of the French Revolution, and its apathy towards tradition. However, ever since the communist, Marxist and anarchist tendencies came to dominate socialist thinking from the late 19th century, Western revolutionary socialism has often harboured an active opposition to traditional institutions that even liberalism doesn't share. Many Western socialists have come to believe that traditional values and institutions are oppressive because they uphold the traditional order of things, and have often called for their dismantling. In the 20th century, many self-identified socialist thinkers were among those who contributed to the active challenge towards, and erosion of, traditional institutions, which eventually led to the almost value-free cultural landscape we now inhabit. Compared to revolutionary socialists, at least liberals have mostly played no

part in this active undermining of traditional values and institutions.

Western revolutionary socialists often believe that, once they have built a socialist society, new socialist institutions will be formed to fulfil the human need for relationships and meaning in life. What they don't understand is that, the traditions that were passed down from time immemorial are the product of evolution through thousands of years of civilization, and have become mostly well adapted to the needs and the temperaments of human beings, bringing out the best in humanity while discouraging its darker instincts. Marriage is one good example of such an institution. It brings out the best in humanity, in fostering commitment, responsibility, caring for one's kin, and so on, while mitigating the destructive effects of primal competition for mates among males by enforcing lifelong monogamy. Every civilization that has ever existed has had marriage, because there simply cannot be

civilization of any kind without the institution of marriage. Also, marriage carries with it important expectations from both within and without the married couple, owing to the strong cultural conventions around marriage that are the product of many, many centuries of evolution. As we discovered during the gay marriage debate, you simply can't reproduce marriage by duplicating it into a parallel institution called 'civil partnerships' or something like that; it would never be satisfactory, as evidenced by the fact that every single jurisdiction that was an early adopter of civil unions has now 'upgraded' to having legal marriage for same-sex couples. Given this experience, it would be even more foolish to call for the abolishment of marriage altogether, to be replaced by some form of communal relationship in a future socialist society, like some extreme socialists still do. No, this will never work, because neither is it well-suited to the biological nature of human beings, nor does it carry the historical significance that is needed to keep everyone committed enough to its

expectations. The point is that, given the long history of evolution of most institutions that have long defined humanity, it is literally impossible to completely rebuild society from scratch and expect a result anywhere as good.

Therefore, while the radical socialists may have some valid concerns about liberalism, especially as it existed in its early days, their utopian solution simply doesn't work. Rather, I think the path not taken here was simply for liberals to acknowledge the importance of maintaining most of the traditions that defined traditional society, particularly in the refined form as they existed among the nobility, but to reform and expand them in accordance with the liberal commitment to liberty and equality for all. Instead of going down the path where every individual became just a worker and a consumer in a capitalist system geared to profits (the path history eventually took), or the impossibly utopian path where people shed all their heritage and embrace a newly created

egalitarian utopia (the socialist path), humanity could have gone down the path where the great traditions that used to define nobility are now reformed and expanded so that everyone could participate in them, in an egalitarian way, thanks to the application of liberal values. I call this path Enlightenment Traditionalism. In fact, there exists a few areas of life where history did sort of go down this path. The wide expansion of education to people of all class backgrounds, while still retaining a syllabus in the traditional classics, is a good example. You could even argue that the expansion of equal marriage to same-sex couples is broadly in line with this spirit. The only trouble is that, it has not been applied more frequently in history.

Central to any vision of Enlightenment Traditionalism would be an emphasis on the family. After all, back in feudal times, the nobility often made sense of life around the bonds of family and extended family, and drew their purpose in life from upholding the

traditions of their family. Moreover, values like honour also made sense mostly because of this familial framework. Life was absolutely great for the nobility; it is why, to this day, people are still very fascinated by the life of the nobility from times long gone. The actual problem with feudalism was that not everyone got to enjoy this life. Feudal life was inherently unequal, with only a select few getting to enjoy the nobility life, while most got to essentially live as slaves. This was the problem liberalism had to solve. But once we solved this problem, I think our goal should have been to allow everyone to live the nobility life.

Of course, for various reasons, history didn't go down the path of 'Enlightenment Traditionalism', and it's not something we can change. One of the reasons could have to do with the scarce resources and need for labour intensive work back then, which means that if everyone lived a somewhat nobility-like life there wouldn't be enough people working the

factories 12 hours a day. However, we are now long past that phase of development, and thanks to automation, the dream of everyone living a nobility like life could come true in the not-too-distant future. From the standpoint of the early 21st century, then, the path towards something resembling Enlightenment Traditionalism does not lie in material difficulties as much as in a loss of traditional values, and especially a strong emphasis on familial bonds and familial pride. In the next chapter, I will illustrate how Moral Libertarianism, with its core value of Equal and Maximum Moral Agency for All, could potentially help revive the centrality of family to humanity, under the right conditions. This will hopefully pave the way for a future society that could sort of resemble the 'Enlightenment Traditionalism' vision, once other necessary conditions are met (such conditions will be explored in a later chapter).

A vision inspired by the idea of Enlightenment Traditionalism can potentially fill in the missing parts of liberalism as it exists, and can be a much more satisfactory alternative to a utopian and elusive revolutionary socialism that has already disappointed many generations throughout Western history. I call this possibility 'Liberal Traditionalism', because it seeks to uphold, update and revive traditional values while still being committed to the core liberal values of liberty and equality.

What Would Enlightenment Traditionalism Have Looked Like?

As with every successful vision, if the Liberal Traditionalist idea is to take off, and eventually inspire positive social change, we need to at least have a rough idea of what it looks like. After all, we need to be able to imagine what something would look like, if we are to work towards some version of it. So what would a Liberal Traditionalist society look like? I guess a good first step would be to go back into history, to imagine what an 'Enlightenment Traditionalism' society would look like, if history had indeed taken that path.

Inspired by the egalitarian values of the 'historical Left' of the Enlightenment, I imagine that an 'Enlightenment Traditionalism' society would uphold equal rights, equal dignity and equal opportunity for every citizen. However, the classical values from earlier times, especially those that inspired members of the nobility to

greatness, would continue to be upheld. Thus, there would also be a lot of emphasis on values like honour, honesty, charity, bravery, loyalty, purity, and the like. The shared culture would emphasize these values so they would form the cornerstone to everyday problem solving and conflict resolution. I imagine that social relations would be much healthier than it is now, as a result.

The debate of how to best achieve and apply the aforementioned values to life would be a major part of intellectual culture. The dominance of these very concrete values would also mean they form the basis of a shared meaning for life, which would probably prevent the rise of the set of postmodern wishy-washy concepts dominant in certain intellectual circles today, which are much less conducive to community building. At the very least, this would prevent the rise of public intellectuals who speak or write in a deliberately difficult to understand manner, who are for some reason

celebrated for their supposed 'profoundness'. In other words, intellectuals would be immersed in clear and constructive conversation that actually benefits people, rather than being drowned in pointless 'profoundness'.

At the heart of an 'Enlightenment Traditionalism' society would also be the importance of family life, and the importance of relationships that uphold family structures. Instead of the landscape of broken families we actually have today, I imagine that an 'Egalitarian Traditionalism' society would have strong and enduring structures of extended families. The big, multi-generational Household of feudal times might even have survived, and the Household might have been at the centre of much of life's important events, just like it was for the nobility of feudal times. Families would also be much more able to pool their resources to look after family members in need, so the 'vulnerable and needy' population in society would be much smaller. With a lesser need for

institutions to look after people, there would also be more of a 'human touch' to everyday life.

Strong families of course mean strong private spheres, so people would be much less affected by peer pressure and the need to conform to the 'fashion of the day' in terms of interests, ideas and values. There would be much more diversity of thought as a result. Moreover, different families would develop their own divergent traditions over time, as well as their own interpretations of the core values, through the practice of those values in accordance with their own needs and circumstances. In turn, intellectuals would be nurtured by the culture of their own extended family. With a diversity of views and practices among different extended families (or clusters of extended families), intellectuals from different families would have come up from different traditions, and therefore naturally having very different views on things. This would make cultural conformity

simply impossible, and lively debate in the marketplace of ideas something that is as natural as the sun rising in the East.

In conclusion, we see that an 'Enlightenment Traditionalism' society would be more family-based, healthier, more diverse in thought (and thus freer), less conforming, more moral, and probably happier than the one we live in now. Therefore, it is still something to inspire us, even if history ended up taking a different, less ideal, path. As Liberal Traditionalists in the real world, I guess we may have to accept that we can't totally rebuild the society 'Enlightenment Traditionalism' would have been. For example, given our cultural habits and our economic structure that have developed over time, it is probably inevitable that people would be living in nuclear families for the foreseeable future, and the medieval-style big Household won't be coming back any time soon. (However, technologies around virtual meeting spaces hold a lot of promise to link up nuclear families

virtually and provide regular extended family bonding time, so perhaps all is not loss.) Despite the limitations, however, there's still a lot we can do to 'recover' the 'lost ground of history', simply by promoting the right values in society. In the following chapters, I will discuss how upholding the Moral Libertarian principle of Equal Moral Agency for every individual can lead to a revival of family life (which would be central to any Liberal Traditionalist vision), and why more family autonomy is ultimately good as long as the Moral Libertarian principle is observed throughout society. Finally, I will outline what a Liberal Traditionalist agenda could look like in the 21st century.

From Equal Moral Agency for Individuals to Equal Moral Agency for Families

The core value of Moral Libertarianism is Equal and Maximum Moral Agency for all individuals. This is the form it should take as it is being applied to various political and legal situations, as well as social situations (except between family members). There is absolutely no room for any collectivism in this formulation, as any sort of collectivist consideration would, by definition, be incompatible with Equal Moral Agency for every individual.

However, does this mean a society committed to Moral Libertarianism would foster the atomization of individuals? Not necessarily. The Moral Libertarian principles in no way preclude the otherwise normal functioning of human relations. In fact, absent any external social engineering, which is prohibited by Moral Libertarianism, human beings would be expected to express their biologically hardwired

evolutionary instincts for everything, including for interpersonal relations. One such instinct would be the family instinct, which is strongly hardwired in human beings due to its evolutionary importance. This is why, absent any external social engineering, and absent any artificial economic strains, a culture of strong family values will always naturally exist.

In fact, while as liberals and Moral Libertarians our basic position would be to treat people as individuals on the level of politics and law, on the social and cultural level individuals naturally voluntarily congregate into associations, most often defined by the biological bonds of family and extended family. On the social level, members of a family do not naturally exist as completely separate individuals, partly because their biological instincts prevent them from thinking of themselves this way. (In the case of adopted or blended families, these biological instincts are effectively transferred to apply to non-biologically related people, especially over

long periods of time, so they too function as a coherent unit, just like biologically related families.) Families tend to function as a single unit a lot of the time, which is why there's the saying that families are the building blocks of society. This is why, where we consistently apply the principle of Equal Moral Agency between individuals on the level of politics, economics and law, on the level of society and culture this will naturally manifest as the Equal Moral Agency between families.

While the oppression of individuals, as in taking away their fair share of moral agency, is inherently morally wrong, throughout history this oppression has been most often felt on the family level, where a family feels oppressed because they do not have the agency to make autonomous decisions as a family, which negatively impacts their ability to function as a coherent unit. I will use two examples, one from feudal times, and one from more recent times, to illustrate my point.

It is important to note that the main reason why feudal social relations were oppressive was because there was almost never any Equal Moral Agency between families. Using a very simplified example, the family of the Lord clearly had much moral agency over the family of the peasants, who had to obey the Lord's order on just about everything. In this way, while the Lord's family was almost always able to make decisions in an autonomous way (except when they must obey the King and his family), the peasants' families could only make decisions that do not conflict with the wishes of the Lord and his family. Given that there were many more peasants than there were Lords, most families were indeed oppressed during feudal times. In other words, if every family could live like the Lord's family, feudal society wouldn't have been oppressive at all; it may even have been healthier than today's society on balance, due to the emphasis on extended family relations. Feudal society was oppressive

chiefly because peasant families were oppressed.

Looking at a more recent example, the effects of the oppression of black Americans during the Jim Crow era can also be seen through a family lens. For example, the refusal of colleges to admit black students affected not just the black student applicant themselves; it dashed the hopes and dreams of the whole family.

Similarly, the police brutality towards black people characteristic of that era affected the wellbeing of black families as a whole. While some far-left academics have used the Marxist-inspired critical race theory to analyse racial oppression, treating black people as a class akin to Marx's proletariat, I think that approach is totally misguided. Instead, I believe the collective nature of racial oppression resides entirely in the fact that families and extended families are, as a whole unit, impacted by the oppression. A family-based analysis would have adequately taken into account the collective

side of the impacts of oppression, without introducing divisive neo-Marxist thinking into the mix that eventually morphed into the unhealthy identity politics we see today.

A somewhat related observation is that, I believe the fact that black Americans often form a reliable voting bloc, as particularly demonstrated during the 2008 and 2012 US elections, while women do not do the same, as demonstrated during the 2016 US elections, is proof that the family-based analysis is correct, and the neo-Marxist analysis is wrong. That black people usually live in all-black families, but women almost never live in all-woman families, is what makes the difference, since families usually vote as a bloc. If neo-Marxist critical theory, which sees both black people and women as oppressed classes akin to Marx's proletariat, were correct, then both populations would have formed a voting bloc in a similar way. In my mind, this provides the ultimate case for adopting family-based analysis, and rejecting

neo-Marxist analysis. People simply aren't divided into 'classes' on a sociological level, they are instead divided into families, consistent with their natural biological instincts.

In conclusion, while the principle of Equal Moral Agency should apply to individuals and only individuals on the level of politics and law, this would often naturally translate into the Equal Moral Agency between families on a social and cultural level, because of the biologically hardwired human instinct for family life. In a society that is serious about applying Moral Libertarian values, which by definition is dedicated to preventing external social engineering, a strong pro-family culture would naturally flourish. Furthermore, I believe many historical examples of oppressive social relations should be seen from the perspective of families as the unit being oppressed, particularly on a social and cultural level, in order to completely appreciate the impacts of such oppression. This also represents a more

realistic and healthier alternative to the neo-Marxist critical theory tradition, which has promoted much unnecessary social conflict in recent years.

Answering Criticism About 'Oppressive' Families

For those of us who propose a society where families are granted maximum autonomy to make their own decisions and manage their own affairs, a common criticism we get is that there are many oppressive and abusive families out there. Wouldn't our proposal allow this harm to go unchecked? Firstly, as with all proposals, it is never a good idea to go to the extreme, and as much as the vast majority of families are great and supportive, I do acknowledge that there are a few abusive families. Mental illness is a real thing, and there must be enough social safeguards for those caught in naturally unfortunate situations. On the other hand, many examples of so-called oppressive families are actually the result of transferred oppression from a lack of Equal Moral Agency from other areas of life. Where a society consistently upholds Equal Moral Agency for all, such 'oppressive family dynamics' would cease to exist. Let's look at two major examples to prove this point.

The most common example of 'oppressive family dynamics' people talk about is perhaps regarding parents who don't accept their LGBT children, or families who don't extend acceptance to their LGBT members in general. However, what we really should remember is that, a lot of the time families act like this ultimately because of social or peer pressure. In communities with higher LGBT acceptance, we see unaccepting families much less commonly. Therefore, family non-acceptance of LGBT members is ultimately because of a lack of Equal Moral Agency between families, whereby a family feels like they have to kowtow to the expectation of other people and families. A culture of Equal Moral Agency between families would go a long way to solve this.

Another example of 'oppressive family dynamics' that is often discussed, particularly among feminists, is regarding men who won't treat their wives with respect and as equals.

Again, I believe a lot of this is influenced by external expectations. This influence has been particularly strong historically, when patriarchal attitudes were dominant. Therefore, sexism within families is also often ultimately a product of a lack of Equal Moral Agency between families. A culture of Equal Moral Agency between families, combined with a commitment to Equal Moral Agency between individuals within families, would go a long way to improve the situation.

In conclusion, many cases of 'oppressive family dynamics' are ultimately due to a lack of Equal Moral Agency between families. Removing collective social pressure on families to conform to certain expectations would be the best solution.

On Applying Liberal Values to Traditional Structures

So far, we've explored how the alienation of liberalism from traditionalism was mostly an accident at birth that didn't have to be, how a fusion of Enlightenment values and traditional values could have produced the perfect path that was not taken during the 19th and 20th centuries, and how even if we can't go back and change history itself, we can still aspire to a similar vision as modern liberals.

However, it remains true that most liberal writing has a sole focus on liberty and equality for the individual, and don't generally discuss how these values can interact with traditional institutions and the wider structure of the traditional social fabric. I think there remains a lot of philosophical, theoretical and perhaps even academic work to do in this area. One problem with contemporary liberalism is that its myopic focus on electoral politics and

technocratic governance has limited the development of liberal theory. The fact is, the bulk of academic social and political theory that was developed in the past few decades are somewhat ultimately traceable to the radical socialist and Marxist tradition (including, but not limited to, all kinds of critical theory, postmodern theory, gender theory, queer theory, and the like), and the 'dissident minority' are mostly in the conservative tradition. I believe that, if liberalism is to have a future, it must start producing philosophers and theorists, and gain a much stronger footprint in academia and the public intellectual sphere alike.

To help with this process of developing liberal theory in general, and a liberal theory of how liberalism can enhance traditions in particular, a theoretical framing of the core liberal spirit, such as the Moral Libertarian principle of Equal Moral Agency, would be useful. In the following two chapters, I will be exploring how this

principle would interact with family structures, and how this principle can indeed lead to both more strong families and fewer 'oppressive' families.

Towards a Comprehensive Liberal Traditionalist Agenda

NOTE: In this book, I will use 'Enlightenment traditionalism' to refer to the hypothetical historical 'path not taken', and I will use 'liberal traditionalism' to refer to the path we could possibly forge in the future.

Throughout this book, we have seen how a liberal traditionalist agenda, inspired by the historical 'path not taken' of fusing Enlightenment and traditional values, could not only cure the crisis of meaning in contemporary liberalism, but also lead to a stronger social fabric, healthier families, and a lot of interesting academic theory. The logical next thing to do would be to think about how we can develop this vision into a concrete and comprehensive agenda.

I guess we should start with healing the alienation between liberalism and tradition. One way to do this would be to emphasize the times in our culture and politics where liberalism and traditionalism can actually meaningfully come together. A good example would be during the gay marriage debate, when a 'liberal' case (based on freedom and equality, advanced by liberal politicians around the world) and a 'conservative' case (based on family values, advanced by politicians like former UK Prime Minister David Cameron) were both argued for, and ultimately complemented each other. The experience with gay marriage is the ultimate proof that liberalism and tradition are not necessarily opposites.

The next most important thing would be to revive the work of developing liberal theory. The liberal traditionalist agenda is, on some level, ultimately about answering the important social questions. Right now, both the socialists-Marxists and the conservatives have profound

and somewhat convincing answers to many of the important social questions people are asking, but liberals only have what are often seen as 'shallow platitudes'. This gap is the result of decades of neglect of deeper discussions and a strong focus on pragmatic electoral politics among liberals. If liberalism is to be kept alive, if we want people to continue to passionately argue for liberalism way into the future, liberals need to be able to have satisfactory answers to the important questions about society and life. While liberalism, on its own, can sometimes sound a bit too procedural and transactional for some people, the combination of liberalism with traditionalism can provide a more meaningful and relatable lens.

Finally, I think it would be important for liberal traditionalists to participate in the free market of ideas, as public intellectuals, political commentators, and social critics. After all, this is the only way for the liberal traditionalist

perspective to be present in the debate at all. Of course, there are barriers to participation from the establishment in the market, so we must be creative about doing so. Perhaps we should go with a more broad tent method, or perhaps we should create our own 'parallel institutions'.

Liberal Traditionalism in a Broader Moral Libertarian Societal Framework

Finally, let's consider how a liberal traditionalist movement could fit into a broader society functioning on Moral Libertarian ideals, a society where there is Equal and Maximum Moral Agency for every individual.

As I have often said in the past, classical liberalism is actually rooted in freedom of religion (rather than 'capitalism', that myth came from Marxists who force-fitted a 'materialist' analysis to liberalism). A true Moral Libertarian society would be like the original vision of freedom of religion, the vision that started the whole classical liberalism movement, completely fulfilled, and also updated to 21st century conditions. The 'update' that is needed is simply to expand equal freedom of religion into equal freedom to act on one's morality in every dimension, which would of course still include religious morals.

The reason for this 'update' is that, unlike in the 18th and 19th century, not everyone is religious nowadays, and even religious people could be influenced by factors other than religious belief in modern times.

As such, a true Moral Libertarian society would have two clear characteristics: firstly, every individual, and by extension every group, every movement, and every sub-culture would be able to live by their values, unimpeded by external 'peer pressure'; secondly, this would essentially create a 'free market' of ideas being put into practice, with the 'fruits' of each idea serving as proof of its soundness or lack thereof. People will be able to judge each idea, and whether they should adopt it, by their results. The best ideas would therefore always win in the long run.

Therefore, a true Moral Libertarian society would allow Liberal Traditionalists 1) to always

live by, and in the process, also gradually improve and refine the practice of their ideals and 2) to make the case to wider society that Liberal Traditionalist ideals are worth adopting, through showing the benefits. This would effectively be all that Liberal Traditionalists need, to live according to their moral conscience. With the safeguards of the Moral Libertarian principles, collectivist agendas, including radical anti-tradition agendas (e.g. to abolish the family and organize people into communes), would not be able to be forcibly imposed on them. Of course, a true Moral Libertarian society would not allow Liberal Traditionalists, nor any other group for that matter, to impose their views on other people. However, Liberal Traditionalists 1) would not need to do that anyway; 2) would indeed arguably lose their core ideals if they ever do so, because they would lose the 'liberal' part of their creed, and hence effectively become the authoritarian conservatives of old that the Enlightenment sought to end.

It would not surprise me if a Moral Libertarian society eventually leads to a majority of citizens living by some form of Liberal Traditionalism. Many traditionalist ideas, particularly those around the value of family and social fabric, are sound adaptations to the human condition, including the biological and social needs of individuals. They are sound because they are the products of many centuries of evolution, and it is highly unlikely that anyone could come up with something entirely new and better suited to humanity's needs. In a truly free society, the soundness of these ideas would be proven by their fruits, that is, the benefits they bring to people living by them. On the other hand, traditional beliefs are not always perfect. Society could often do with a bit more fairness, compassion and inclusion, as the civil rights movement, improvements to women's equality, and gay equality movements have shown.

Unlike old-school conservatism, Liberal Traditionalism allows these adaptive evolutions to occur, through its embrace of free speech, open-mindedness, and a live and let live

attitude. In this sense, Liberal Traditionalism is really the best of both worlds, and a Moral Libertarian society would allow people to choose the best of both worlds, without having to pick one and sacrifice the other.

Therefore, in conclusion, Liberal Traditionalists should aim to build up a Moral Libertarian society around them, because that would be the best arrangement, indeed perhaps the only arrangement, that would allow their movement to thrive.

Appendix: Equal Moral Agency Does Not Require Equality of Outcome

(NOTE: This does not have too much to do with Liberal Traditionalism per se, but I need to respond to this critique.)

Ever since I published my articles and books about Moral Libertarianism and the principle of Equal Moral Agency for all individuals, I have repeatedly encountered a critique from the far-left: that rich people surely have much more moral agency than regular working individuals, so someone serious about Equal Moral Agency must hence become a socialist or something like that. Let me break this down: firstly, I do agree that the way society is set up now sometimes allows rich people to coerce poorer people in some ways, and this should change; but secondly, it doesn't imply that we need to move to socialism to adequately solve this problem.

Let me first clarify what I mean by Equal Moral Agency. It's essentially the same as the equal freedom of religion that underpinned classical liberalism in the 18th and 19th century, but expanded to include moral beliefs that are not necessarily religious. Basically, everyone should be free to practice their own moral beliefs, including but not limited to religion, as long as this would not unfairly limit another's rights to do so. Now, this does not imply the right to have an equal impact on the rest of the population. Indeed, there could be no such right, because even in a perfectly free and fair market of ideas, some ideas are going to be much more persuasive than others, and hence adopted by more people. Therefore, the principle of Equal Moral Agency is to be interpreted as a personal right within oneself, the way freedom of religion is interpreted. The fact that a rich businessman has much more tools at his disposal to proselytize his religion has never been interpreted as a lack of freedom of religion. Therefore, I believe Equal Moral

Agency doesn't necessarily require equality of resources.

On the other hand, Equal Moral Agency necessarily requires that the rich must not be able to coerce the poor into giving up their moral agency. This 'coercion' would include the carrot as well as the stick, because in either case the ill effects on morality are the same, i.e. letting an imperfect human being have proportionally too much moral agency and inadequate balances and checks on their behaviour. (Also, if you apply the idea of opportunity costs, carrots are just sticks worded in reverse, so carrots and sticks are really not that different anyway.) In our modern world, such coercion could include restricting the acceptable speech of others, compelling others to take certain stances, or making certain beliefs so taboo that one dare not voice it lest they lose their job or worse. These things are of course much easier to do for those with lots of money. Therefore, I believe a case can be made

for some sort of regulation, to prevent this coercion from happening.

Moreover, while Equal Moral Agency is a personal right, it does not mean there are no public sphere requirements of equal treatment. To illustrate this, we should again think about how freedom of religion is applied. For example, a public square that allows the preaching of one religion but not another would surely be seen to violate freedom of religion. In our modern world, digital platforms have essentially become our public squares. Consistently, a digital platform that allows the promotion of one religion but not another would rightly face a public outcry. Therefore, censorship of certain points of view on digital platforms could indeed be justifiably seen as an affront to the spirit of Equal Moral Agency. On a related note, a large part of the Moral Libertarian ideal is a free and fair market of ideas, so Moral Libertarians should naturally support less censorship and more free speech under all circumstances.

Furthermore, while Equal Moral Agency does not appear to call for equality on the basis of race, gender, sexuality and so on, in practice, a lack of equal treatment and equal opportunity in these areas could lead to the erosion of Equal Moral Agency. For example, in a society where racial minorities or LGBT individuals have a particularly hard time finding a job, some of them could become more willing to give up their moral agency (in terms of free speech, for example) in exchange for fulfilling basic material needs. This in turn inevitably leads to a downward race where other people become expected to give up their moral agency too (after all, if members of so-and-so minority can do it, and you're not racist or homophobic or whatever, then why can't you do that too?). I believe this gives justification to anti-discrimination laws, like the Civil Rights Act in America.

Of course, one can argue that a communist society would do away with the aforementioned problems entirely, being a cashless society where private property and wage labour is banned. However, every solution has its pros and cons, and the two should be balanced to get us as close to Equal Moral Agency as possible. While a communist society would solve the problem of discrimination in private employment by eliminating private employment altogether, anti-discrimination regulations could achieve the same in a market economy. However, a completely planned economy places a lot of power in the state or the collective (i.e. whoever gets to plan the economy), which inevitably comes with other losses of freedom, e.g. the freedom to start a small business, to turn your passion into useful products, without the permission of the state or the collective. This, in turn, actually means that a communist society is likely to be further away from the ideal of Equal Moral Agency than where we are now.

In conclusion, Equal Moral Agency, similar to the idea of freedom of religion which it is based upon, does not mean one has an equal right to impact the rest of society as another. Hence, there is no need for equality of the amount of resources at one's disposal. There could be a need to regulate certain aspects of society so that the rich and powerful cannot coerce other people to agree with their moral stances. However, I believe to suggest that we should move to something like a planned economic system as the solution would be entirely missing the point, because a planned economic system would almost by definition be further away from having Equal Moral Agency compared to where we are now.